

Questions and Answers National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW)

1. What is NIIW?

National Infant Immunization Week, April 14 - 20, is an annual observance that highlights the importance of timely immunization. It is a time to focus greater attention on our achievements and on the work we do throughout the year to raise coverage levels. We celebrate with our partners the accomplishments that would not have occurred without successful collaboration. We also take the time to revitalize joint efforts to remind parents, caregivers, health care providers, and others of the need to take appropriate steps to protect children against 11 vaccine-preventable diseases and give them a healthy start to life. Our four main goals are:

- Make parents and caregivers aware of the need to protect their baby from birth against 11 vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Encourage better communication between parents/caregivers and their health care provider.
- Inform parents and caregivers they need to follow through on the recommendations by making and keeping needed appointments.
- Provide parents/caregivers with the toll-free 800 numbers they can call to locate a facility that offers free immunizations for their infants if they do not have a health care provider.

Our key messages are:

- Immunizations are one of the most important ways parents can protect their children against serious diseases.
- Immunizations are extremely safe thanks to advancements in medical research and ongoing review by doctors, researchers, and public health officials.
- Children are far more likely to be harmed by serious infectious diseases than by immunization.
- Infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases; that is why it is critical that they are protected through immunization.
- Children who are not immunized increase the chance that others will get the disease.

2. What are some of the activities have occurred across the country during NIIW?

In 2001, NIIW was held in Newark, New Jersey. The week began with a kick-off breakfast at the Newark Club attended by two hundred immunization leaders from government, healthcare, and private industry. Speakers included Sen. Robert Torricelli, Congressman Donald Payne, Dr. Jules Titelbaum, Children's Hospital of New Jersey, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, Christine Grant, New Jersey State commissioner of Health, Dr. Louis Cooper, vice president, American Academy of Pediatrics, Catherine

Cuomo-Cicere, commissioner of the Newark Department of Health and Human Services and Dr. Jose Cordero, deputy director, NIP, CDC. The event was covered by both local New Jersey TV stations, as well as local radio stations and newspapers, including the *Newark Star-Ledger*, the state's largest paper.

Following the breakfast, Drs. Cooper and Cordero, Congressman Payne and Commissioner Grant attended the New Jersey Pediatric Leadership Coalition. The coalition is a networking group of 30 to 40 key New Jersey pediatricians and family physicians whose primary goal is to influence health, political and managed care policies. Dr. Bob Morgan of the New Jersey Health Department moderated a lively discussion concerning pediatric practice issues. Dr. Cordero gave a brief overview of the new National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

The day concluded with the Spanish-language NIIW media launch of the 2001 Hispanic Public Service Campaign. The event was held at the Courtyard Plaza in a predominately Hispanic community, and was sponsored by FOCUS and La Case De Don Pedro, two Newark Hispanic community centers. The event was emceed by Jorge Ramos, Co-anchor Noriciro 47, Telemundo Spanish-language television. Speakers included Congressman Robert Menendez, Dr. Cordero, Frank Morales, chairman of FOCUS, and Dr. Debbie Salazar-Lopez, medical director, FOCUS.

Following the formal ceremony, there was a health fair with information booths, a band, a raffle and clowns. The event was well covered by the Hispanic media, including Telemundo, Univision and local Spanish-language radio.

In 2000, the NIIW kickoff was held in Houston, Texas. On Friday, the day before the official kickoff in Houston, Dr. Jose Cordero spoke at a San Antonio NIIW Kickoff and Appreciation Breakfast. Dr. Cordero was once again the featured speaker that afternoon during the rollout of the Spanish-language PSA campaign. Additional speakers included the local state representative and senator, City of Houston Fire Chief, and the Houston Commissioner of Health. The PSA rollout took place at a local firehouse located in a Hispanic neighborhood. A firehouse was chosen because of the theme of the PSA, ABe a Hero, @ featuring a fire fighter. The presentation was followed by a street festival featuring bands, local celebrities, and refreshments. A local Hispanic radio station provided sponsorship and did a local remote from the site.

A rally, similar to the one held in Chicago in 1999, kicked-off NIIW in a downtown park and was once again sponsored by Hope for Kids. About 400 volunteers attended and, following the event, returned to their local neighborhood to canvass with immunization messages. Hope for Kids rallies have been held for several years in local Houston neighborhoods and have been tremendously successful. However, this was the first year that it will be held in a centralized location. Also in attendance will be Representative Gene Green who announced legislation he is sponsoring to increase the VFC funding. The day

concluded with an awards dinner where the local coalition recognized leaders in Houston's immunization efforts.

In addition, more than 500 activities took place during NIIW 2000, including award dinners, health fairs, extended clinic hours, grand rounds for providers, and neighborhood canvassing, each year, for the past two years. Last year, for example, the California Department of Health and its partners sponsored a Amock pox outbreak @ to draw attention to the importance of the varicella vaccine.

In 1999, the NIIW kickoff was held in Chicago, Illinois. The day began with a rally sponsored by Hope for Kids of approximately 3000 volunteers held in Union Park. Following the rally, community volunteers went door to door to remind parents and caregivers of the importance of immunizations. Following the Union Park event there were three smaller rallies in Lake, DuPage and Cook counties where CDC/NIP officials spoke. There were 300 - 600 volunteers at each of these rallies. These three communities have strong local identities and local media. The events provided these communities with a sense of being part of a major event and increased local community media coverage. Following the local kickoffs the volunteers went door to door to promote immunization awareness and provide information on locations for immunizations. During the day, volunteers visited homes of more than 100,000 children, including 14,000 children in families without health insurance. The day concluded with an evening awards/recognition ceremony at the Navy Pier which was attended by approximately 600.

3. How important are partnership in promoting the importance of childhood immunizations?

Partnerships with public and private groups have enhanced traditional public health immunization efforts. They have resulted in:

- Revitalization of existing and development of new statewide and local coalition to promote parent awareness about the value of vaccinating their children, encourage health care providers to use every opportunity to vaccinate children in their care, and highlight the vaccination needs of infants and children during NIIW.
- Implementation of innovative strategies to remind parents when shots are due and recall them when shot appointments are missed (e.g., telephone, letter contact), reach children who do not have a regular source of medical care and refer them to a health care provider (e.g., door-to-door visits with parents), and use pre-existing contacts with parents to check their children's immunization status (e.g., getting kids immunized through contacts with Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs).
- Improvement of community planning and development for immunization

programs.

- Expansion of outreach campaigns and public service announcements to call attention to the need to properly immunize children.

Particular emphasis has been placed on enhancing partnerships between public and private health care providers. Such partnerships have been strengthened largely due to the inception of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program which became operational across the Nation of October 1, 1994. This program established, for the first time, a mechanism to provide public vaccine to private providers to serve eligible children. Activities related to implementing this program were instrumental in raising awareness of immunization issues (e.g., missed opportunities, new vaccine recommendations, contraindications, new strategies to raise immunization coverage) among providers, increased communication between public and private providers, and resulted in more opportunities to provide technical assistance regarding immunization.

4. What promotional campaigns are available to highlight the importance of childhood immunizations?

In an effort to raise immunization rates among Hispanics, the CDC will introduce a national Spanish-language media campaign that will be launched during NIIW. The Spanish-language media campaign will consist of a full color poster, Video News Release (VNR), a television PSA and a radio PSA.

The television PSA will be distributed to 100 Spanish-language TV stations as well as to Telemundo and Univision. The purpose for the Video News Release is to provide Spanish-language television stations with a culturally appropriate vaccine related story and several news segments. We have heard from Spanish-language News Directors that there is a serious need for video footage depicting Hispanic families and physicians in clinical setting as well as a need to explain the importance of vaccination. This 90-second Video News Release will be sent to Spanish-language news directors at TV stations across the country. We have also created two Radio PSA s. The first features a doctor praising a father for bringing his child to the clinic and staying on the immunization schedule. The second is informative B making parents aware of the possible consequences of failing to vaccinate on time. The radio PSA will be distributed to over 250 Spanish-language radio stations in the top 25 Hispanic media markets. The posters will be distributed to community centers, community leaders, churches, schools, and healthcare facilities.

5. Why is there a separate English-language PSA targeted to Hispanics?

Under-immunization is a problem that particularly affects the Hispanic Community. When targeting U. S. Latinos with health messages in English, language alone is not the most effective means of communications. Health messages need to reflect:

- a thorough understanding of culture and traditions,
- the emotional significance and pride of the Hispanic culture, and
- ethnic identification through experience, expression, reaction and body movement.

Given this fact, it is imperative that culturally relevant advertising be created for English speaking or English preferred Hispanics to motivate the target audiences to have their children vaccinated before age two.

6. Why is childhood immunization an important issue?

Immunization is one of the most effective ways of protecting against disease. The level of most vaccine-preventable diseases has been reduced by more than 99 percent since the introduction of vaccines. Reported cases of many vaccine-preventable diseases are at, or near, all-time low levels. Before widespread immunization in the United States, infectious diseases killed or disabled thousands of children each year. Tens of thousands of cases of paralytic polio and nearly 400,000 measles cases were reported annually.

Just ten years ago a measles epidemic swept across the nation leading to 55,000 cases of measles, 11,000 hospitalizations, and more than 120 deaths. We implemented improvements in services, increased access, and identified innovative ways to overcome many barriers to immunization. As a result we have made tremendous progress in protecting our children's health. Today more children than ever before are immunized against serious diseases.

However, we cannot rest upon our accomplishments. In fact, our work has just begun. More than million children are still not adequately immunized and we must begin anew each day as 11,000 more children are born that we must protect.

7. The U.S. has the highest immunization coverage rates ever for 2-year olds and virtually no cases of vaccine-preventable diseases. Does this mean that we have reached a point where we can reduce the attention given to childhood immunization programs? Why not focus on other child health problems?

While it is true that disease levels are low and immunization rates are high, much remains to be done to assure the protection of our Nation's children into the next century. About 900,000 2 year-olds are not fully protected against vaccine-preventable diseases, and every day approximately 11,000 children are born who need the full series of vaccines. Much of what remains to be done involves fully implementing proven strategies to maintain, and increase coverage rates. We need to continue to work until such proven strategies are effectively in place.